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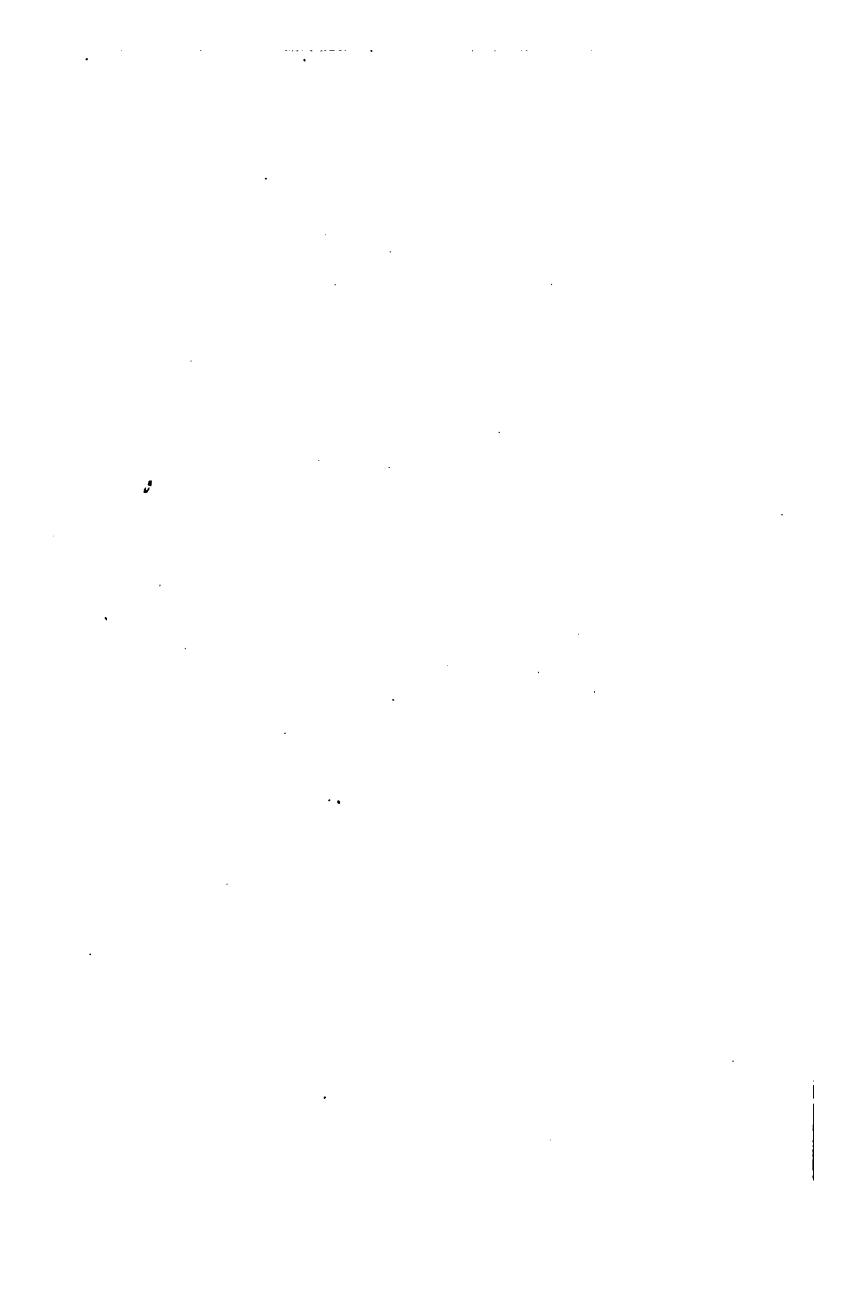
CONFIRMATION





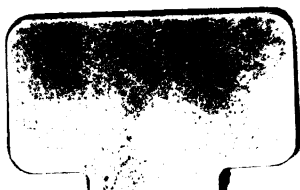
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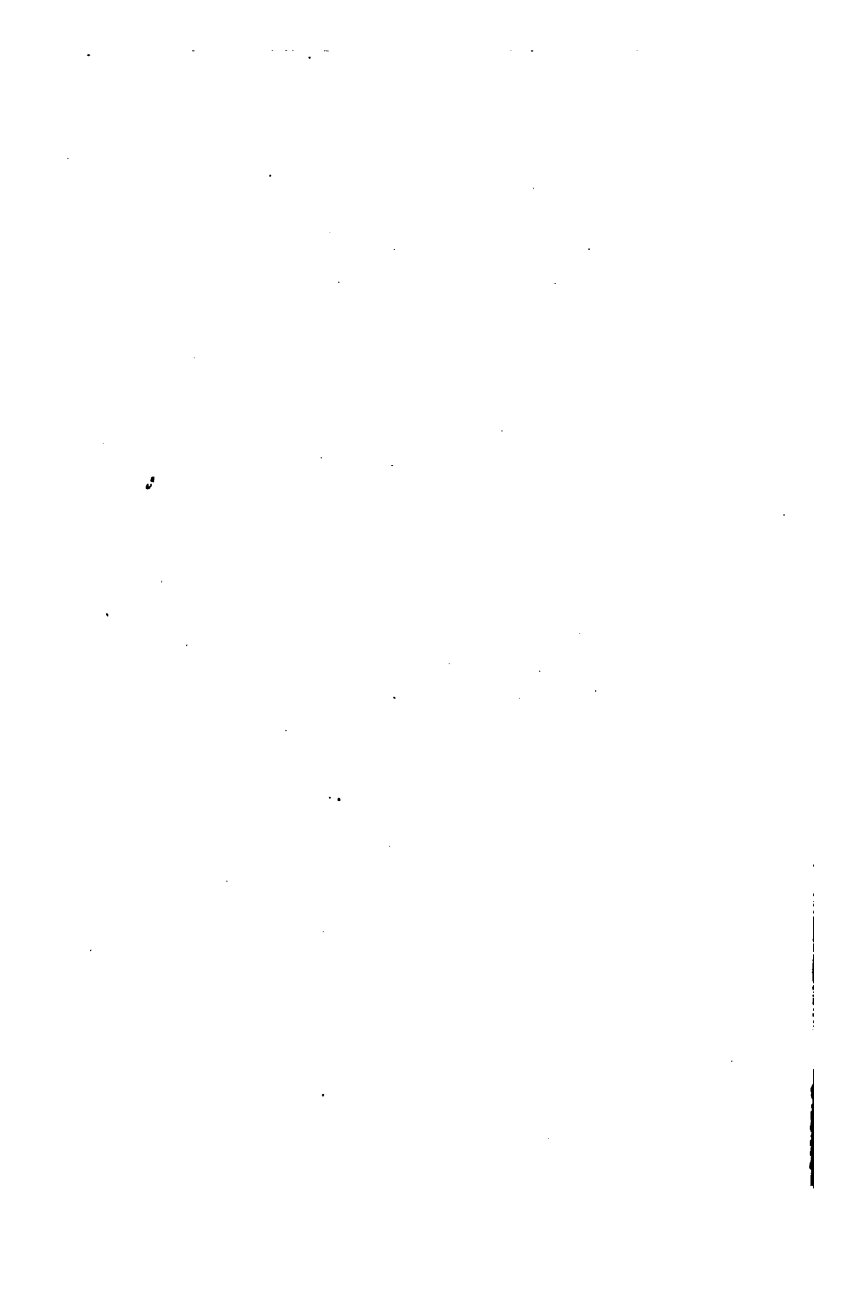


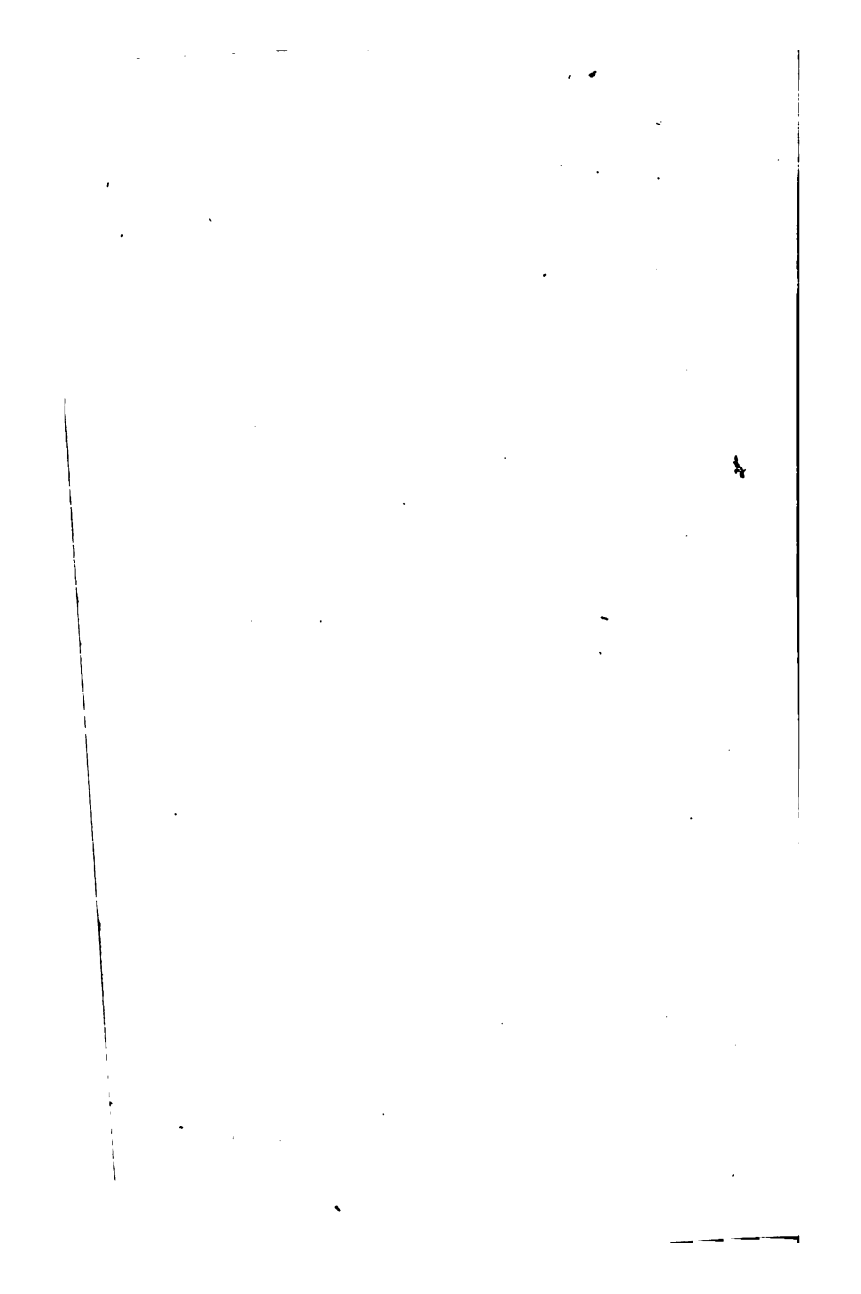




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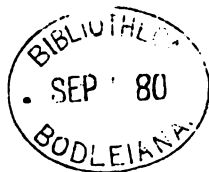
CONFIRMATION

OR

Called and Chosen and Faithful.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'THE GOSPEL IN THE CHURCH'S SEASONS'
SERIES.

*WITH A PREFACE BY THE VERY REVEREND THE
DEAN OF CHESTER.*



GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,
WEST CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.

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P R E F A C E.



THE season of preparing for Confirmation, as it is a time of grave responsibility, is known also by experience to be frequently a time of much spiritual blessing. Alike in parishes and in schools, the clergy who have given the most affectionate and most prolonged attention to the subject use the same encouraging and thankful language of this great opportunity.

Hence any book is to be welcomed, which has a tendency to invest this period in the life of the young with a more solemn interest, to foster at the same time the spirit of cheerful hope in

regard to it, and to provide the mind with thoughts that under God's blessing may be productive of solid benefit afterwards.

The present volume seems to me to be well worthy of this description ; and it strikes me as being of the greater value, because it comes to us from a woman's hand. It is written by a Deaconess of the Church of England. One of the most useful duties of those who bear that title is to give help in preparing girls for Confirmation.

After careful reading of the book I have been led to fix my attention, and I seek to fix the attention of others, upon four points in particular which it suggests.

Stress is strongly laid here, but not at all too strongly, on the importance of entire self-devotion, on the absence of all reserve in dealing with Almighty God at the time of Confirmation. Such

reserve, indeed, is quite useless ; for He 'knows our thoughts long before,' to Him 'all hearts are open.' But an absolute surrender is likewise the secret of true happiness ; and the administration of this sacred ordinance is an opportunity, when such a surrender is definitely contemplated, with every help to make it a reality.

The weightiest motive for this devotion of the heart is to be found in the sense of Christ's redeeming love. Many questions arise in the minds of the young at such a time, on the contemplation of their responsible position in this mysterious world ; and such questions cannot be avoided. But wherever true self-knowledge is found, there is also the consciousness of sin. The heart is thus drawn to the Redeemer in thankful acknowledgment of God's free mercy : and this result answers many questions ; and if it does not dispose of all, it

PREFACE.

practically shows that some of them may be left for the present unanswered.

True to the teaching of the New Testament, our Prayer Book, both in this part and everywhere, lays much stress on the direct action of the Holy Ghost on the individual heart. This subject, too, finds its right place in the following pages; and no words could exaggerate its importance.

From the ordinance of Confirmation the thoughts travel, naturally and easily, to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The one, in fact, is the preparation for the other. The Holy Communion may be viewed in many aspects, but one of them is justly made conspicuous here. In partaking of this sacred feast, Christians proclaim Christ's redeeming love from age to age. In speaking of it under this aspect St. Paul uses precisely the same word which he employs to describe the act of preaching. Those

who, after Confirmation, come for the first time to the Lord's Table, begin to take their part in the great missionary proclamation of the Saviour's death till He comes again. It is a high honour, which may well kindle a true Christian ambition.

'Till He come.' This little book suitably concludes with Mr. E. H. Bickersteth's beautiful hymn, of which these words are the motto and the subject—words which carry our hopes into the farthest future, and yet call us to the patient discharge of present duty, admonishing us to be ever 'true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.'

J. S. HOWSON.

THE DEANERY, CHESTER,
March 17, 1879.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
<i>CONFIRMATION, PART I.,</i>	13
<i>CONFIRMATION, PART II.,</i>	31
<i>HOLY COMMUNION,</i>	49

CONFIRMATION.

—o—

Part I.

For they are taking the baptismal vow
Upon their conscious selves ; their own lips speak
The solemn promise.'

WORDSWORTH.

Almighty and ever living God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate Thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins, strengthen them, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and daily increase in them Thy manifold gifts of grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness ; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of Thy holy fear, now and for ever. Amen.

CONFIRMATION.

PART I.

‘Let us go on unto perfection.’—HEB. vi. 1.

THESE words, which we have chosen as our key-note for a few thoughts on Confirmation, seem essentially to express the spiritual character of this holy ordinance. They seem to contain the inner meaning of the outward ceremony. And, found as they are at the beginning of the passage in Heb. vi. 1, which speaks of the *laying on of hands* in conjunction with the doctrine of *Baptisms*, of Resurrection, and of Eternal Judgment, they show that this time of Confirmation should be a time of advancing to a fuller ripeness, should be a quickening of our Christian course, should be another stage in our spiritual manhood.

To all to whom this season of Confirmation is anything but a mere form, it must be, at all events, *a striving to go on unto perfection.*

We *choose* this day *whom* we will serve, therefore it must be a going on. We choose this day the Fatherhood of God instead of the thralldom of Satan. We choose this day to be faithful soldiers and servants of Christ instead of the servants of our fleshly nature. We choose this day the sanctification of the Holy Spirit instead of *the world which lieth in wickedness*, therefore it must be a going on. We choose this day to take up as our weapon our baptismal gift and token, and to fight under the banner of the cross, instead of seeking to please ourselves. We choose this day to separate ourselves unto the Lord. *All that the Lord says shall we do, and be obedient.* We choose this day to give *our own selves to the Lord*, therefore, surely, it must be in the fullest meaning of the words a going on.

Truly, then, may our Confirmation motto be *Onward!* Truly must we, who have thus been *called and chosen*, strive to live worthy of such a calling by being *faithful*; for only

so shall we be fulfilling the apostolic admonition *to go on unto perfection.*

‘Onward ! the goal thou seekest
Is worthy the quest of a life ;
And love can give to the weakest
Courage and strength for the strife.

‘Onward ! our cry for ever,
Till the glorious goal be won,
’Mid the brightness, fading never,
Of the light-enshrouded sun.’

Confirmation, which means *strengthening* or *establishing*, is a sacred rite, which has been handed down to us from the very beginning of the Christian Church. We are told, also, that before the establishment of this Christian rite, the Jews held a somewhat similar custom. ‘When the Jewish children came to be thirteen years of age, and had learnt the law and their prayers, they were presented by their father before a holy assembly, and there solemnly took upon themselves the observation of the law, and were thenceforth to answer for their own faults. All this was concluded with prayer for their increase in good works.’¹ Our blessed

¹ Bishop Dehon’s *Sermons*; also Lange on this subject, vol. i.

Lord is supposed to have been brought to Jerusalem, as we read in St. Luke ii. 42, for this very purpose. And a glance into ancient history will show us that even among the Athenians, who knew not God, it was usual, when their young men were enrolled according to the usage of their nation, for them to bind themselves by a solemn obligation to observe the perpetual solemnities and received customs of their country, and to defend and reverence the religion in which they were born.

In the Acts of the Apostles we have Confirmation, or laying on of hands, alluded to more than once. And it is especially interesting to note that Samaria was the first place where this rite of Confirmation was administered, Sychem or Shechem, in Samaria, being the first place in Canaan where God appeared to Abraham when he came from Haran, and where he built an altar to the Lord.

It seemed fitting that this place, so famous in many ways in the old dispensation, should have been the place where two of the twelve apostolic patriarchs of the spiritual Israel

should receive its children into full communion with the Christian Church by the laying on of hands.

Thank God, the gift of His Holy Spirit is not limited to apostolic times ; but each young soldier, who goes forth with a real desire to obtain this priceless gift, *will* be given the power of the Holy Ghost, and will be, by His grace, invigorated for life's warfare, and will in Confirmation find the consummation of the promise of God made to each in *his* Baptism, and be strengthened to fulfil *his* baptismal vows of renunciation, faith, and obedience.

We see from the passages referred to in Acts and Hebrews, 'not only the apostolic origin of Confirmation, but the identity of our Confirmation with that of antiquity and of the Acts of the Apostles. It is also an interesting fact that the Church now uses the same prayer in her office which was used nearly fourteen hundred years ago in Confirmation.'

Those who have not had the privilege of having been as infants brought in the sacrament of Baptism into covenant with God,

must, of course, be baptized before they can be confirmed. The teaching for those coming to adult Baptism is similar to the teaching for those presenting themselves for Confirmation; for, being now free agents, they have for themselves to make the solemn vows, they themselves profess to have returned to God in repentance and faith.

We would now try and gather up a little of the teaching given to those who are candidates for Confirmation or adult Baptism, hoping that, by God's grace, it may help some to remember and to put in practice a few of the valuable lessons given by God's ministers to those who are being prepared for Confirmation.

In Confirmation there is, firstly, the rite itself; secondly, the deliberate choice, the taking upon ourselves the individual responsibility; thirdly, the blessings given by God the Holy Ghost. Every covenant implies two things: the promise and the promiser. In Confirmation, the baptismal covenant is renewed by ourselves. The 'I do,' said by each individually, marks our deliberate choice; then the Church prays for us, that we may abide by this decision.

The living faith in the efficacy of the blood of Christ to atone for sin can alone cleanse us from sin, and we daily, hourly require the help of the Holy Spirit.

The laying on of hands is, in the Old Testament, a sign of benediction ; and in the New Testament, it goes on farther, and is intended to convey the sign of the imparting to us of the Holy Spirit. We find this mentioned in the Epistles to Timothy.

Confirmation is, then, as we have seen, a season of choice, of openly declaring ourselves soldiers of the Cross, and of our willingness to fight under its banner. Josiah is a good example of this, as we read in 2 Chron. xxxiv., xxxv. And the choice, to be of any good, must not only be deliberate, but it must be *decided*. Decision for Christ is the great want,—the standing firm, the keeping through God's grace in the centre of the narrow path ; the having our eyes looking *straight on and our eyelids straight before us* ; the giving to God *obedience*, which is the test of all true discipleship ; the being *faithful unto death*, for to this alone is promised *the crown of life*.

For our Confirmation to be a means of grace, and not merely an outward ceremony, preparation of the heart is even more essential than mental knowledge. And though it is always good to be able to give to others an answer that they can understand *of the hope that is in us*, yet it is the heart that God requires firstly, and which is the most acceptable to Him.

At the season of Confirmation, God seems peculiarly to be saying to each individually, 'My son, my daughter, give me thine heart.' This might seem to be a very easy thing when we remember *all* that God has given to us, but it is not easy. Other things—things of this world—are always trying to draw our hearts away from God. Idolatry, the great sin of the Jewish nation, is just as much a danger in the Christian Church; just as much are we in danger of letting other things come between our hearts and God. And we have as much need of St. John's loving caution, '*My little children, keep yourselves from idols,*' as had his converts even from heathenism.

All that we can love for God's sake is

good to be loved if we love God best. And let us ever remember that love is God's highest, holiest gift to us here or in heaven; only the love, as all our other gifts, must be kept in subordination to the love of God and to the will of God. And so shall we be able to render back to Him the entire homage of our body, soul, and spirit.

The greatest help in rendering to God all that He justly requires from us will be found in prayer—true, humble, reverential, unreserved prayer. This will bring us, as it were, into the very heart of religion, and then we shall find what a noble, solemn thing religion is, and that only those into whom God has breathed the breath of life can be religious. No mere animal could understand anything of religion.

Three things are comprised in religion, three great elementary truths: belief in God, belief in our own spirits, belief in a future state. Surely the most careless, knowing of their undying spirit, must, at one time or another of their lives, ask, What are we here for? Whither are we going?

Here, surely, to do God's will, for on

doing the will of God here, will depend where we go hereafter. As we see in Gal. vi. 7-8, this is the sowing time for the eternal harvest. The more we strive to make our lives here the beginning of the life we shall live hereafter, the more closely we shall be able to follow in Christ's steps here, and the nearer we shall be afterwards to God, the source of all true light, knowledge, beauty, love.

Religion is especially a happy thing to the young ; therefore, God is so loving that He receives us in our very infancy, and makes us His children, so that the very first prayer is the 'Our Father,' when the Church, as Christ's representative, receives us into the congregation of Christ's flock, and sends us forth sealed with His seal. This seal we ratify in Confirmation.

Baptism is a covenant or contract. A contract must of necessity be between two persons. In Baptism the covenant is between God and the child. In it God promises us three things, and we promise three things to God. God promises us membership with Christ, the privilege of being the children of

God, and an inheritance in His heavenly kingdom. We promise to God renunciation, faith, and obedience. Renunciation is the putting away from us *all* evil, 'the not following or being led by' what we know to be wrong or even doubtful. Faith is the believing all the articles of the Christian faith, which, taken from the pages of Holy Scripture, are summed up for us in our creeds. Obedience is the keeping, not only in the letter but in the spirit, God's holy commandments. We are *pledged*, therefore, *to believe* all that a Christian ought to believe, and pledged *to do* all a Christian ought to do. This we solemnly ratify with our own lips in our Confirmation, when

'Once more we vow the holy faith
To keep unstained and true ;
Once more we promise unto death
Thy holy will to do.'

In all things we require the renunciation of self. God's promises will be, we are sure faithfully kept, but we must be faithful too ; and to be really faithful, we must be *faithful in that which is least, faithful in all things*. As George Herbert says :

‘Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.’

We are born into three distinct things. First, we are born into a family. Secondly, we are born into a country. Thirdly, we are born into a church. Of this Church, Christ Himself is the only Head,—He the Head, we the members. In His great love He has given us this Church, into which we have been brought in our Baptism, and which, as we grow up, educates us for Christ ; meeting us again in our Confirmation, again in the Holy Communion. And as we go on through life, we find how this beloved Church continues to meet us at every change or turn of these mortal lives, building us up in our most holy faith, and endeavouring thus to make us more fit to be the *children of a King*.

There are five distinct parts in the Catechism: the baptismal covenant, made between ourselves and God ; from this will follow—if, indeed, we with our own hearts ratify this covenant—faith, obedience, prayer, and a rightful participation in the sacraments.

The word sacrament was first used to signify *a military oath*, which soldiers took and were expected to keep faithfully. So that it has been very beautifully and fitly applied to the two sacraments of the Christian Church ; for in our Baptism we are made soldiers, and promise to fight *manfully* under Christ's banner. The word mysteries in the Holy Communion Service, and the word mystical in the Baptismal Service, mean the same as the word sacrament, one being derived from the Greek and the other from the Latin.

There are only two sacraments, as we find in our 25th Article. They were ordained by Christ Himself, and received by the ancient Catholic Church, from which the Church of England is come down to us, and through which she has traced her commission. These two sacraments are necessary, where they can be obtained ; and it is mere presumption to wish for salvation and to knowingly put aside God's appointed means.

There are two parts in these two sacraments which our Church acknowledges : the outward sign, the inward grace. There are three conditions : repentance, which is a

death unto sin; faith, which is believing in the merit of our Lord and Saviour; obedience, which is the keeping of God's commandments.¹

The words, 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' would be more rightly translated *into*, and this has a deeper significance, as the 'into' in 1 Cor. x. 2. The Israelites left Egypt behind, and were content to follow their leader, and in doing so were baptized into a new covenant. So we, when we are baptized, profess to leave sin behind, and to follow Christ. Hence Baptism is meant to represent, as we find in Rom. vi., a dying unto sin and a rising again unto righteousness. Let those, then, who have been baptized, ask themselves if they are going on, *if they have put on Christ*. Let those who are being prepared for Confirmation ask themselves if this is in very deed a step *onwards* in their lives, and if they are seeking *to go on unto perfection*. Let them ask themselves whether, before God and His congregation, they can answer within their hearts, in the solemn promise 'I do,' that they are *called, and chosen, and faithful*.

¹ See Eleventh Article.

'FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH.'

Go forward, Christian soldier,
Beneath His banner true !
The Lord Himself, thy Leader,
Shall all thy foes subdue.
His love foretells thy trials,
He knows thine hourly need,
He can with bread from heaven
Thy fainting spirit feed.

Go forward, Christian soldier !
Fear not the secret foe ;
Far more o'er thee are watching
Than human eyes can know.
Trust only Christ, thy Captain,
Cease not to watch and pray ;
Heed not the treacherous voices
That lure thy soul astray.

Go forward, Christian soldier !
Nor dream of peaceful rest,
Till Satan's host is vanquished,
And heaven is all possessed ;
Till Christ Himself shall call thee
To lay thine armour by,
And wear in endless glory
The crown of victory.

Go forward, Christian soldier !
Fear not the gathering night ;

The Lord has been thy shelter,
The Lord will be thy light.
When morn His face revealeth,
Thy dangers all are past ;
Oh, pray that faith and virtue
May keep thee to the last !

Church Hymns.

Almighty and ever-living God, we desire this day to fix our hearts on Thee. Grant, we beseech Thee, that our sins having been washed away by faith in the efficacy of our Saviour's blood, we may now witness a good confession before Thy Holy Church, and be made partakers of Thy heavenly grace. Let Thy Fatherly hand ever be over us ; let Thy Holy Spirit ever be with us ; and so lead us in the knowledge of Thy Word, that in the end we may obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONFIRMATION.



Part II.

‘So should thy champions, ere the strife,
By holy hands o’ershadowed kneel.’—KEBLE.

Defend, O Lord, this Thy child with Thy heavenly grace,
that he may continue Thine for ever, and daily increase in
Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto Thy
everlasting kingdom. Amen.

CONFIRMATION.

PART II.



‘No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’—ST. LUKE ix. 62.

THESE words, spoken by our Lord Himself, seem to have the same reference to those who have been confirmed, as the words, *Let us go on unto perfection*, have to those preparing for this solemn rite, the young soldiers who *have put their hand to the plough*. In their Baptism they were adopted as the children of God, therefore they are already bound; but, now they have individually acknowledged this binding, they have each one for themselves put their hand to the plough, and in doing so have promised to go *onward*.

To look back is fatal. This looking back will be a great temptation all our lives. It

cannot be conquered once and for ever, but always will there be the danger of looking back, of falling back. And without the help of the Holy Spirit we must do so irrevocably; but, thanks be to God, we may always have that help. So with our eyes fixed upon Christ, and endued with the strength of the Holy Spirit, we can go on, and, putting our hand on the plough with a firm grasp, we can be made *fit for the kingdom of God*.

No wonder that those who are assembled to be present at a Confirmation should look grave and earnest, when we remember that the service calls us together to witness the renewal of the vows by which these young soldiers are about to pledge themselves, in the sight of an all-holy God, to be His in spirit and in truth, and to be His for ever.

Our churches seem to partake of the general feeling,—our churches, with their solemn height and beauty; these earthly temples, which are indeed *a figure of the true*. Yes, even our churches, upon Confirmation days, seem to speak in silent language of the faith which in them is taught, as the young,

‘at the foot of God’s Table, renew the vows of their Baptism.’

And then the service, so solemn in itself, so full of import for the future ! One scarcely wonders if in a moment of weakness some would fain draw back from the obligation which they are about to take upon themselves—if some would fain wish to leave the battle-field, and to return to the world. But such a wish, however natural, is founded on a misconception of truth.

Candidates for Confirmation are in reality not free to choose as to the position they hold in God’s universe. Once baptized, once admitted into Christ’s Catholic Church, there can be no drawing back. The members of Christ, the children of God, the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven cannot be like the heathen, to whom such a privilege has not been given. They may, it is true, despise the privileges that have been given to them ; they may, it is true, break the vows that have been made for them ; but for them it is no longer a question whether they will accept Christianity or not. The question for them is whether, it having been accepted

for them, they will *renounce* it. And though no second promise in reality can increase responsibility, the public ratification of such a promise must ever be regarded as peculiarly solemn.

And as the prayer is prayed, and the hand of benediction is laid on the bowed heads, and as the organ tones take up the *Amens*, no wonder that we feel that such vows must be registered on high. Well may we pray—

‘Make us faithful, make us pure,
Keep us evermore Thine own;
Help Thy servants to endure,
Fit us for the promised crown.’

No wonder that God’s ministers, who have carefully prepared these candidates for Confirmation, and who for them have *watched unto prayer*, should regard this moment, that they lead up these young members of their flock to present them for this holy rite, with feelings of intense and anxious solicitude.

No wonder that those kneeling in prayer for these candidates feel with almost a thrill of pain the *fulness* of the promise which these young soldiers are making for themselves. Knowing the warfare which lies before them

makes every Christian present yearningly long that they may 'forget not the keeping of vows, forget not the promise,' but that they may 'go from holiness onward to holiness.'

For we know that the vow made in these two little words, 'I do,' means *everything*. It does not mean only to do one thing that may seem to us good, or to leave undone one thing that may seem to us evil. It means *all—everything* that is wrong, *everything* that is right. It means daily, hourly to follow Christ.

Knowing, then, all the vow means, it is little wonder if the candidates themselves, and those who care for their success in the battle of life, should be fearful. But let us take courage, for far stronger than Satan is our great High Priest, who, having Himself *overcome*, is for ever interceding for us that we may be enabled to overcome. And far stronger than Satan's emissaries is God the Holy Ghost; and strengthened with His might we may indeed *go on*, and through His grace we shall be able to bear to the end 'the Spirit's seal.'

And though we know full well that

‘A sacred burden is the life we bear,’

still let us

‘Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly,
Stand up and walk beneath it stedfastly ;
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win.’

And let us ever remember that by our own act, and *compassed about with a cloud of witnesses*, in heaven and upon earth, God and His holy angels listening, we answer, ‘I do.’ There is joy in heaven if we say it from our heart, as good and faithful soldiers of Christ. And also that it has been most solemnly prayed for us ‘that we may be strengthened with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and that we may *daily* increase in His manifold gifts of grace ;’ and again, that we may ‘*daily* increase in Thy Holy Spirit.’ We see, then, that the Church’s first thought in her Confirmation Service, her first prayer, is for the *daily* increase of the gift of the Holy Spirit, ‘and that God’s fatherly hand should ever be over them, His Holy Spirit ever be with them.’

‘ Draw, Holy Ghost, Thy sevenfold veil
Between us and the fires of youth ;
Breathe, Holy Ghost, Thy freshening gale,
Our fevered brow in age to soothe.

‘ And oft as sin and sorrow tire,
That hallowed hour do Thou renew,
When, beckoned up the solemn choir
By pastoral hands, towards Thee we drew ;

‘ When, trembling at the sacred rail,
We hid our eyes and held our breath ;
Felt Thee how strong, our hearts how frail,
And longed to own Thee to the death.’

A Confirmation, as well as being most deeply interesting to the candidates themselves, to their friends, and to those who have earnestly and lovingly prepared them for the rite, must be a subject of heartfelt interest to the congregation of which they are the younger members. To all who think at all, must the remembrance come vividly back of their own Confirmation and first Communion.

If we are members of Christ, we must also be the members of those who are Christ's ; and we must desire for others, as for ourselves, that they should be filled with decision in the cause of Christ, and the grace of His

Holy Spirit. Membership with Christ should enable us to strive after the example of His blessed life, and to be filled with His love and holy courage.

The thought of Christ's individual love to individual souls will make this a somewhat less difficult attainment. As St. Paul puts it, '*Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*' Our love to Christ, too, must be unreserved love, the keeping nothing back, as He in His wondrous love kept nothing back, but gave His whole life as an example and as a sacrifice, and remembering that the promise of eternal life is to those who *take up* their cross daily, so as to follow Christ. So will our hearts be given to God as gifts consecrated to His service,—so shall we be able to do all to the glory of God! And although we shall still be in the world, yet we shall not be of the world. Always in the midst of dangers and temptations, yet trying always to remember the apostolic injunction, '*Be sober, be vigilant.*' This vigilance, this prayerful watching, will go far towards helping us to *keep the heart with all diligence*. We shall see how needful this command is when we re-

member that *out of the heart are the issues of life*. And this is the more essential to dwell upon, because Satan's great subtlety makes him often try to attack us most by what seems best in itself. Well may we offer to God *our hearts*, and pray Him *to keep them above all keeping*, shielded with the shield of faith. We have a good example of this in the character of Samuel. Placed in the midst of the greatest temptations, he yet resisted all, strong in his childhood's spirit of loving obedience: '*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*'

If we remember our covenant with God, He is sure to remember the *everlasting covenant* He has made with us.

These thoughts bring us back to our starting-point. '*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*' Christ often illustrates His teaching by symbols from nature,—we find this all through the Gospels,—so that little everyday things, which, perhaps, we should scarcely have noticed, are consecrated to high and holy purposes, and the world of nature is brought into close contact with the

world of grace, the world of sense made a beginning of the world of glory.

Just as ploughing is no easy matter in the natural world, so is it no easy matter to sow in our own hearts, and in the hearts of those around us, grain meet for the eternal harvest ; and, even when sown, it is no easy matter for it to spring up unto perfection.

On our Confirmation Day we put forth our hand voluntarily to grasp with a firmer hand this plough spoken of in our text.

And surely such an object as the kingdom of God should have power to nerve our arm for the fight ; surely it is worth our highest aims ; for whatever sacrifice the winning it may entail, whatever suffering we may have to endure, through whatever conflicts we may have to pass, we are sure that even the way to it is really best and happiest. For God's side, the right side, is that chosen by martyrs and saints ; and the same Holy Spirit is able to help us, as He helped them.

Then let us go on, looking forward to the goal ; and though fearful, yet let us not be discouraged, but with eyes fixed upon the light, let us press onwards. The children of

a King, let us look upwards to the kingdom of which Longfellow says :

‘Look on the light of the ages, the spirits majestic.

. . . They stand by the throne, all transfigured,

Vested in white, and with harps of gold, and are singing
an anthem

Writ in the climate of heaven, in the language spoken
by angels.’

Another help towards our keeping our hands steadily on God’s plough would be the thought that, voluntarily and solemnly, we have *promised*, we have *vowed*; therefore let us not forget our promise. In the Bible we have seen that vows, which mean the *most* solemn promises, were ever held as sacred. We see this, for instance, in Jacob, Hannah, David. Therefore vows, if rightly made and faithfully kept, are most useful towards the offering to God our homage, our intellect, our affection. Thus, though by the sacrament of Holy Baptism God’s vows are upon us, yet are we called to take them deliberately upon ourselves, and so to make them our own.

A vow, if real, must always be a most impressive act. Sometimes, indeed, this is

felt so strongly, that we give an outward token of the inward obligation. We see this in many instances in daily life, and we have it frequently in the Bible,—when Jacob vowed unto God, and set up the altar of stone; and in the ‘altar of witness,’ in Josh. xxii. 27.

May our Confirmation be this stone of witness; may we be able to say:

‘But when our childhood’s morn was ending,
And we ’neath holy hands were bending
Beside that altar’s witness-stone,
Our prayer had caught an altered tone.
The cheek with shame and hope was burning,
To a loved Father’s house returning;
It seemed to chide and yet to cheer,
And to that blending hope and fear
It brought our endless birthright near,
And from this rude world seemed to sever,
Binding us to that shrine for ever.’

But of all the help which we are given towards the keeping of our baptismal vows, towards the increasing in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, the fire of divine love is the greatest. This it is which, as a *band of love*, draws us first to put *our hand to the plough*. This it is which will make the battle-field easy, this love which is heaven-born;

for *God is Love*. This love will be, if we seek it, given to us in full measure ; but it can be enkindled in us only by the grace of the Triune God,—this God of all joy, and beauty, and love—this God who is Creator, Saviour, Comforter. Bending low in adoration, we acknowledge His omnipotence, and with a thrill of most loving gratitude our hearts call upon Him as *Our Father*. This love to God must therefore be most purifying, for, casting out all that wars against God, it will give the power of entire obedience to His will. As one of our poets tells us :

‘Therefore, child of mortality, love thou the merciful
Father ;

Wish what the Holy One wishes, and not from fear,
but affection.

Fear is the virtue of slaves, but the heart that loveth is
willing.’

Yes, most truly is the service of God a service of perfect freedom.

‘In a service which Thy love appoints

There are no bonds for me,

For my inmost heart has learned the truth

That makes Thy children free ;

And a life of self-renouncing love

Is a life of liberty.’

This fire of divine love must, as we have seen, be the gift of God, kindled in us by the Holy Ghost. That it may burn brightly, it must be constantly fed by all the means of grace which God in His love gives to us,—public worship, a prayerful intercourse with God, a believing partaking of the Holy Communion ; so, indeed, shall we *grow up unto Him in all things.*

The strife may appear long and wearisome, but what will this matter *afterwards*, if only the three great enemies of Christ have by us been overcome—if only we have been enabled stedfastly to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil ? What will the hardness we may have had to endure, the weariness of the battle-field, matter, when we have fought the fight ? when, proved, we shall be found to have *endured unto the end*, to have been *faithful unto death* ? Let us go on,

‘ Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
And in His mighty power.
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts,
Is more than conqueror ! ’

God in His mercy grant that this may indeed be so, and that, following in Christ’s

steps, we may be enabled by the *strengthening* of His Holy Spirit to *go on unto perfection* ; that having put our hand to the plough, we may not look back, but reach onwards to the kingdom of God ; that so in that kingdom we shall be found to have been not only *called and chosen*, but to have continued '*faithful* to our life's end.'

'LORD, I WILL FOLLOW THEE WHITHERSOEVER
THOU GOEST.'—ST. LUKE ix. 57.

O JESUS, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end ;
Be Thou for ever near me,
My Master and my Friend !
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me !
The world is ever near ;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within ;
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear Thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will.
Oh, speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control ;
Oh, speak, and make me listen,
Thou Guardian of my soul !

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
To all who follow Thee,
That where Thou art in glory,
There shall Thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end ;
Oh, give me grace to follow
My Master and my Friend !

Oh, let me see Thy foot-marks,
And in them plant my own ;
My hope to follow duly
Is in Thy strength alone.
Oh, guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end ;
And then in heaven receive me,
My Saviour and my Friend !

Church Hymns.

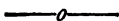
HOLY COMMUNION.

'Forth from the world, its hope and fear,
Saviour, we seek Thy shelter here ;
Weary and weak, Thy grace we pray ;
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guests away !'

BISHOP HEBER.

O almighty Lord and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies, in the ways of Thy laws and in the works of Thy commandments, that through Thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION.



‘*This do in remembrance of me.*’—ST. LUKE xxii. 19.

THESE words, in all their exquisite human tenderness, take us back through these well-nigh nineteen hundred years to that upper room in Jerusalem, where on the eve of the Passover, the great typical feast of the real Sacrifice, the Son of man, *the night He was betrayed*, knowing in His foreseeing love how much we should need this, which is a touch of His very self, gave us this Holy Communion as a pledge of His wonderful love, which most truly is—

‘A voice from mercy’s inmost shrine,
The very breath of love divine.’

And not only has the Lord Jesus given us the sacrament as a blessed means of grace, but He also makes it a special bond of love between Himself and His people,—‘*This do*

in remembrance of me.' The Lord's Supper extends, like a bright chain of loving rite, from the cross to the throne—pointing as it does backwards to its first celebration, and forwards to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

We have the account of the institution in the first three Gospels. And so important a part is it intended to have in our religion, that St. Paul tells us that he has *received it from the Lord Jesus*. We do not wonder that St. John, the most deeply spiritual of the divinely inspired writers, should give us in our Lord's discourse in the sixth chapter of his Gospel the explanation of what Christ's death is to do for the world, and the spiritual meaning of what this Holy Communion should be to those who receive it faithfully.

'Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face,
Here would I touch and handle things unseen ;
Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace,
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

'Here would I feed upon the bread of God,
Here drink with Thee the royal wine of heaven ;
Here would I lay aside each earthly load,
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

‘Feast after feast thus comes and passes by,
Yet, passing, points to the glad feast above;
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
The Lamb’s great bridal feast of bliss and love.’

As we have seen, then, that the sacrament of the Holy Communion is so high a means of grace, so a right use of it must be most important to our spiritual growth. It is a solemn act of worship appointed by God to show our faith in the atonement of the death of Christ, and for pleading *it* before the throne of grace ; as well as the loving means which Christ has ordained for conveying to our souls the benefits of His redemption.

In the Jewish Church, from which the Christian Church has sprung like the fruit from the blossom, there was a continued line of sacrifice.

Immediately after the fall, God gave the promise of a Saviour, and ordained that His sacrifice of Himself, which would in the time appointed *be offered once for all*, should be typified and set forth by the sacrifice which He then appointed. So, truly, was our Saviour *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. This mystical rite of sacrifice

being the chief act in the gorgeous ritual of the Jewish Church, it was fitting that on the day that the typical Lamb was slain, and on the eve of the day on which was offered 'the one oblation, as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world,' our Lord should give us this memorial feast to continue for ever.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find that this *breaking of bread* was one of the characteristic rites of the early Christians. Atonement being the central fact of true religion, so the showing forth of that atonement is the divinely appointed act which extends from the beginning to the end of time.

The ancient sacrifices were types and shadows pointing to the future; the Eucharists of Christ's Church are memorials pointing backwards to its accomplishment. Whatever other acts of worship we have, and however beautiful and necessary they are, yet this is the great symbolical act of faith in the atonement, and the pleading of it before the throne.

The benefit, too, has an analogy to the ancient Jewish sacrifices: *without shedding*

of blood is no remission of sin. This points, of course, to the blood-shedding of Christ ; but just as the Jews despised not their sacrifice, so should we rejoice to partake of our typical feast. The doctrine of the spiritual presence of Christ to the soul of the believing recipient in the Holy Communion has ever been the true doctrine of the Church of England, — that bread and wine continue bread and wine, but that there is a spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament, and that ‘the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper.’

Let us, then, regard it as a solemn rite of divine worship, distinct from the heresy of Romish teaching on the one hand, and from the teaching which scarcely gives it the place of a sacrament on the other. Let us regard it as a participation in the merits and benefits of Christ’s atonement, the outward sign and seal that we are one with Christ, and Christ with us, that so our reconciliation may be complete.

‘All our redemption cost,
All our redemption won ;

All it has won for us, the lost,
All it cost Thee, the Son.

‘Thine was the bitter price,
Ours is the free gift given ;
Thine was the blood of sacrifice,
Ours is wine of heaven.’

If at other times we feed on Christ by faith, meditation, prayer, must not all penitent hearts specially feed upon Christ in His own appointed ordinance, received in loving, reverential obedience to His own command ? In doing whatever Christ commands, there surely must be a blessing included.

But the command comes to us not only from the upper room in Jerusalem, but from the Father’s mansions ; not only is it the voice of tenderest leave-taking, but it is also the voice of one who, having purged away our sins, has for ever sat down on the right hand of God. St. Paul says, speaking of the Lord’s Supper : ‘ *I have received of the Lord that which also I have delivered unto you.*’ In this we see that the command came even from the midst of the throne.

There are other purposes, too, bound up in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It

is a memorial of all Christ's love to us: '*Do this in remembrance of me.*' This is the leading thought in the consecration prayer in our Communion Service. Memory of all love must be a mighty, purifying power, but nothing could be so purifying as the thought of Christ's love in its depth and height. Then it is a public act, an avowal that we are the followers of Christ,—'*Ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come,*' that death which is the central life of all the world's history.

We do not repeat the sacrifice, we do not continue it, but we proclaim the fact and doctrine. Unbelief has never been able to overcome it; it has a power that no sermon could ever possess. If there had been no such sacrifice, how could the Church have as the centre of her teaching this memorial act? And true it is that—

'No gospel like this feast,
Spread for Thy Church by Thee;
Nor prophet nor evangelist
Preach the glad news so free.'

Do not the words sometimes recur to our minds, '*Ye will not come unto me,*' when we

see so many turning their backs upon the table of their Lord? The table is spread, the banquet ready, the invitation given, and yet many refuse to avail themselves of this means of grace, and help, and strength; and so refusing it, they are depriving themselves of an unspeakable blessing, as well as of the highest source of communion with those who belong to Christ. Here all meet on common ground, in the one relationship, as *kings and priests unto God*.

Surely this Holy Communion is the cornerstone of our belief in the communion of saints: Christ the Head, we the members, all bound together in His body, all forming part of His Church—the Church which is to be the Bride, the Lamb's wife. This Holy Communion has proclaimed Christ's personal love to each individual all these hundreds of years, and is the great outward mark that we belong to *the whole family in heaven and earth*.

Why, then, is it not made more a 'means of grace?' Why is it not more of a realization of the 'hope of glory?' Why do so many of those who are confirmed not become communicants? Because Satan is always

suggesting obstacles. Some say that they are 'unfit,' forgetting that only Christ can make them worthy partakers of His own table. Some are afraid of the word damnation; but this, if they look in the marginal readings of their Bibles, is condemnation, and this, of course, is likely to belong to all unworthy acts of worship. Some like to go on living carelessly, forgetting that Baptismal and Confirmation vows, and, indeed, each confession of sin, lay them under an obligation to lead a godly life.

Are we likely to let our hearts dwell on the thought of our Father's house if persistently we absent ourselves from His table?

Others, again, while trying, as they think, to keep the commandments of the law, forget this last commandment of love.

Not only does the communicant take no new obligation on himself, but the rightful receiving of this sacrament will enable the faithful recipient to keep those vows already made. Kneeling in unbelieving prayer can be no more acceptable to God than such a partaking of this holy ordinance; presumption must always bring chastisement.

The sacrament of the Holy Communion must, then, always stand before us as a memorial of the most transcendent love. We do not wonder that the name most frequently given to it by the early fathers was the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving—a word which combines grace and thanksgiving.

The test for the rightful partaking in this Communion is the test of *all* loving obedience to God's command, faithfulness in all things to God's will—

‘Till from self's chains released,
One sight alone we see ;
Still at the Cross, as at the Feast,
Behold Thee, only Thee !’

Confirmation is the gate of Communion. It would be an unmeaning act to be confirmed if we did not intend to become communicants. Therefore, those who have come with a prepared heart to receive the grace of Confirmation should go on at once to receive the further grace of Communion ; and not only receive it once or twice, but from month to month, or from Sunday to Sunday, as a means of refreshing and strengthening to their souls.

It was because our Saviour knew our nature so well that He has left us this memorial of Himself in its wonderful simplicity ; we are so apt to forget benefits that have been conferred on us ; pleasures, cares, absorbing pursuits are so apt to claim all our attention. This enduring memorial is the greatest of all helps to remind us of all we owe to Christ.

But in this, His tender leave-taking, in the *Do this in remembrance of me*, He as it were recalls us to Himself, enabling us 'who have come to Christ *for* life, to come to this Holy Communion *with* life.' And we may well pray, '*What I see not, that teach Thou me. Give me in this holy sacrament all that Thou meanest me to have.*'

We do not wonder that the apostle should in his exhortation on this Holy Communion conclude with the words, 'Let a man examine himself.' The word is significant. It is used, we are told, to express the refining of a refiner's fire, so that it must be searching ; scorching, it may be—let it be anything, so that it be real. No wounds are really healed till they have been cleansed thoroughly ; no

healing easily will in the end avail. We cannot do better than adopt David's prayer, '*Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*'

Two feelings belong to Holy Communion, abasement and triumph. Abasement, because everything that reminds us of Christ's death reminds us of past guilt; and triumph, because it reminds us of His coming again without sin unto salvation. So that here we have the story of man's fall and of man's redemption, of Paradise lost and of Paradise regained.

Does not a participation in the Holy Communion give us an opportunity of more spiritual exercise and greater spiritual grace? So the early Christians regarded it, fresh themselves from the upper chamber at Jerusalem, the garden of Gethsemane, and the cross of Calvary.

Let us, then, so prepare our hearts and lives for a rightful reception of the body and blood of Christ, for the fulfilling His dying command, '*Do this in remembrance of me,*' that

so this Lord's Supper *here* will be to our souls an earnest of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb *there*.

Our Holy Communion Service, so instinct with reverence and love, with beautiful simplicity, is full of this spirit of obedience and worship. It begins, as all worship must begin, with our Saviour's matchless prayer. Then follows the prayer for heart-purity, for so only can the commandments of God be kept, not merely in the letter, but in the spirit.

The Nicene Creed is used in the Communion Office because it tells us more fully of the divinity of Christ, and of the work of the Holy Spirit. The prayer for the Church Militant seems to bind in one *the whole family in heaven and earth*.

The exhortation which follows tells us of the benefits of this Holy Communion, if approached in a humble, faithful spirit, and of our oneness with Christ in this sacrament. This, to be real, will be shown forth by true repentance and intention of leading a new life. The heartfelt confession of sin is followed by the absolving prayer that we may be confirmed and strengthened in all goodness.

Then come our Saviour's words of comfort :

‘ Whispering, it says to each apart,
“ Come unto me, thou trembling heart.” ’

We do not wonder that the prayer of consecration is immediately preceded by the expression of our unworthiness to approach God's table, and the hope ‘ that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us.’

It seems fitting, too, that in one of the prayers which immediately follow the reception of the Holy Communion, we should offer to God, as our reasonable service, ourselves, our body, soul, and spirit, with all their faculties, all their affections.

Having laid this offering before God, we can gladly rise to join in the ‘Gloria in Excelsis,’ and to give thanks to God for His great glory. And here, perhaps, we may re-echo the beautiful words of the ‘Ter-sanctus:’ ‘With angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high. Amen.’

H. H. L.

'AS OFTEN AS YE EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK
THIS CUP, YE DO SHOW THE LORD'S DEATH
TILL HE COME.'—I COR. xi. 26.

'TILL He come !' Oh, let the words
Linger on the trembling chords ;
Let the 'little while' between,
In their golden light be seen ;
Let us think how heaven and home
Lie beyond that 'till He come.'

When the weary ones we love
Enter on their rest above,
Seems the earth so poor and vast,
All our life-joy overcast ?
Hush ! be every murmur dumb !
It is only 'till He come.'

Clouds and conflicts round us press ;
Would we have one sorrow less ?
All the sharpness of the Cross,
All that tells the world is loss,
Death and darkness and the tomb,
Only whisper, 'Till He come.'

See ! the feast of love is spread ;
Drink the wine and break the bread,
Sweet memorials ! till the Lord
Calls us round His heavenly board—
Some from earth, from glory some,
Severed only 'till He come.'

Hymnal Companion.

